10:Johnson G-3 (no date) 1940 MA11 Kurd MA11
Iraq

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The Kurds are great sportsmen. Even when they have not killed the game themselves, their pleasure after a successful shoot is unmistakable: this shot was shot by Squadron-Leader Johnson

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• 526 857 the town. At intervals they go outside the houses armed with slings and stones. Sometimes as many as fifty boys of all sizes and ages may gather on each side. They commence a great battle, hurling stones at each other with their slings until one side finds the fighting too fierce and beats a retreat. Woe betide the passing stranger who unwittingly walks across 'no man's land' while a battle is in progress!

Now that football has been introduced in Kurdistan the time-honoured battles with slings are being forgotten. Except in the summer, when it is too hot for violent exercise, they rarely take place, the majority of the time being taken up in kicking footballs about. The Kurds have taken to football like ducks to water. In the afternoons, when school is finished, every

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[p. 392 (A)]

square yard of uncultivated ground around the town is used for this game. Those who cannot find space in other parts run up and down the streets playing football.

The social system of the Kurds is essentially feudal. Up to recent times no man could prosper or even feel safe unless under the protection of a powerful agha, whose armed retainers guarded the *miskin* (serfs) from any who might attempt to tyrannize the village. In return for this the agha exercised an overlordship, collecting a percentage of the crops, a fee for marriages, and other taxes. He called out the villagers to fight an enemy when required, and was generally in the position of a feudal baron of ancient England.

An agha used his family as the basis of his power. He produced as many sons as possible, who would be loyal to him in an extremity, and put each in charge of a village, or group of villages, to unite them in the common cause when necessary. If sufficiently powerful he might bring other villages under his control by the simple expedient of annexing them from less powerful protectors. Thus in many Kurdish tribes there is no blood relationship between the aghas and the miskên, but the aghas are of a common descent.

Another important feature in the social system is the shaikhs. Among the Arabs the term 'shaikh' signifies a tribal chief but in Kurdistan a shaikh is a holy man. Certain shaikhly families have acquired the title because they claim descent from the Prophet Mohammed, in which case it corresponds to the title of *seyyid* among other Mohammedan peoples; other shaikhs are holy men, but do not claim such ancestry. Not unnaturally the former class is the more influential and powerful.

It is unfortunate that a number of the shaikhs have not contented themselves with the religious welfare of the people. Like the priestly class throughout the world, they have at times used religious influence to increase material power, and become analogous to powerful tribal

[p. 392 (c)]